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Light shining in Darknes:
OR, THE
EFFECTS
OF THE
Christian Institution,
ANTIENTLY,
Upon the Recusant PAGAN,
And at Present,
Upon the MODERN INFIDEL,
Illustrated in a
DISCOURSE
On JOHN i. 5.

Preached at Christ's Church, *Canterbury*, on
St. JOHN's Day, 1742,

By SAMUEL PEGGE, M. A. K

Vicar of *Godmersham* in *Kent*, and late Fellow of *St. John's*
College, *Cambridge*, Author of the *Examination of the*
Enquiry into the Meaning of the Demoniacs in the New
Testament.

L O N D O N,

Printed for J. ROBERTS, at the *Oxford-Arms, War-*
wick Lane. MDCCXLII.

[Price Six Pence.]

Right Living in Daring

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OF THE

Christian Institution

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and a Pagan
Upon the MODERN INFIDEL

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On John 1. 1.
Preached at Christ Church, Cambridge, on
St. John's Day, 1744.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON, M. A.
Vicar of St. Andrew's in A. and the Rector of St. John's
Church, Cambridge. Author of the Elements of the
Arithmetic and the History of the Language in the New
Language.

L O N D O N
Printed by J. Roberts at the Golden-Chain, in
St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1744.
[Price 6s. 6d.]

T O
THOMAS KNIGHT

Of GODMERSHAM Esq;

A S A

Public Testimony of Gratitude

FOR THE

Many Obligations received from Him,

T H I S

D I S C O U R S E

Is Humbly Inscribed

By his most faithful and

most obedient Servant,

SAMUEL PEGGE.

TO
THOMAS KNIGHT

OF GODMERSHAM HES

AS A

Public Testimony of Gratitude

FOR THE

Many Obligations received from Him

THIS

DISCOURSE

Is Humbly Inscribed

By his most faithful and

most obedient servant

SAMUEL PEGGE.

JOHN i. 5.

The Light shineth in Darkness.

THE several Advantages which accrue to Mankind from the Christian Dispensation, by fixing a Rule of Morality ; by ascertaining a true and acceptable Method of divine Worship ; by enlightening our dark Understandings, and rectifying our corrupt Wills ; by the Assurance of Forgiveness of Sins, and the Revival of a blessed Hope of everlasting Life ; are all briefly included in these general Words, *The Light shineth in Darkness* : For by this Emblem of *Light* may either be designed the divine Author of the Gospel Institution, *Christ* our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, or the Effulgence of his Doctrine, who being the divine *Logos, the Word*, which from all Eternity was with God and was God, and by whom all things were made that are made, became, by his Incarnation, *the Life and Light of Men* : for so runs the Context, *In him was Life, and the Life was the Light of Men. And the Light shineth in Darkness.*

The Condition of the antient *Pagans*, at that precise Time when *Christ* came, is usually represented in Scripture as a *State of Dark-ness*: So grievously had they corrupted their Ways before God, And certainly, as the great Ignorance and Uncertainty which the Antients laboured under in Matters of Religion, and the Grossness of their Idolatry and Superstition, with their miserable Concomitants, Infatuation of Mind and the utmost Degeneracy of Manners, might be aptly enough resembled unto ^a *Darkness* and ^b *Shadow of Death*; such an helpless and forlorn Condition being indeed the temporary Death and Extinction of Man's best and brightest Part, the intellectual Faculties of his Mind: So, on the contrary, the dispelling of these dark Clouds, and the illuminating their Understandings, by a new and farther Revelation of the divine Will, is there expressed, with equal Propriety, by a *Candle*, by the *Day-spring from on high*, and, in general, by *Light*.

But my Design at present is not to illustrate the blessed Influences of the Gospel Dispensation at large, but to confine myself to a more strict and literal acceptation of the Words, as a Topic, tho' little attended to, yet which, amongst others, may well deserve some Regard. I propose then to enquire, how far the *Light*, properly speaking, *shineth in Darkness*, that is, hath proved benefi-

^a Acts xxvi. 18. ¹ Pet. ii. 9.

^b Luke i. 79.

cial and advantageous unto those who have yet been pleased, in all Ages, to reject it : How much even those have been bettered by it, who have been either too blind to see it, or not ingenuous enough to confess it—the ancient *Pagan*, and the modern Infidel.

I begin with the Antients. 'Tis well known, that the Gospel of *Jesus Christ* made its appearance in the World at a time when Learning and Philosophy were esteemed to be at the highest ; that these were both of them banded against it ; the Christian Discipline appearing to those great Masters of Eloquence and Science, to be, on account of its unaffected Simplicity, all Foolishness. It can hardly be imagined, that Men so high-minded should receive any Benefit from a System of Philosophy ; for so we will call the Gospel for the present, which they were naturally so extremely prejudiced against ; and I know not whether the Philosophers at first were much mended by it, because its Operation upon Persons so ill disposed, and where there was no Miracle in the Case, (as there was indeed in that of the great Apostle *St. Paul*) must in its Nature be both slow and secret. Not many of this Class were converted at first, as we are expressly told in the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, which was written about the Year of *Christ* 57. *For ye see your Calling, Brethren, how that not many wise Men after the Flesh, not many mighty,*

mighty, not many noble are called^a. But in a while it is observable, that the Heathen Moralists began to write better than their Predecessors; that is, they insensibly first admired and then adopted the Precepts of the Gospel, sliding unwittingly into the Spirit and Sentiments of the Christian Sages. The Sublimity of their Notions on many Subjects of Importance, together with the Beautifulness of their Expression, deservedly recommend their Compositions to the Perusal even of us Christians, and, so long as Men have any Taste for good Learning or fine Writing, will always secure them a Reputation in the World. These Authors outwardly were no Favourers of the poor distressed Christians, but nevertheless drew great Helps from their Conversation and Sermons, and, at length, from their Writings.

But it was not in their Lucubrations only on various Subjects of Importance that the Antients were assisted by the Doctrine and Discipline of the holy *Jesus*, for, alas! the Treatises of the Philosophers, how excellent soever, could contribute but little to the Reformation of the World: The Knowledge of the Scriptures, and that both of the Old and New Testament, was exceedingly useful in correcting many of their mistaken Notions both in Religion and Morality. The bulk of Mankind never were without a Revelation, but from the beginning had partook abundantly of that Knowledge which was imparted from above to their com-

^a 1 Cor. i. 26.

mon Parents, *Adam* and *Noah*. This heavenly Light was afterwards very much obscured by heterogeneous Mixtures of their own Imaginations; but then, both in the Patriarchal State, reckoning from the Call of *Abraham*, as likewise under the Law, ample Provision was made, and many Steps taken for the Instruction of the idolatrous Nations round about. It is written accordingly in the Book of *Deuteronomy*, that *when the Most High divided to the Nations their Inheritance, when he separated the Sons of Adam, he set the Bounds of the People according to the Number of the Children of Israel*^a. The Children of *Israel*, it seems, were to bear a fit Proportion to the rest of the World, whom they were designed to instruct in the Worship of the one true God; and it was in respect of this instructing Quality, that the People of that Nation are styled, in the Book of *Exodus*, a *Kingdom of Priests* and an *holy Nation*^b. From whence it should seem, that whatever sound Notions the *Greeks* either retained in the midst of their Idolatries and Corruptions, or afterwards imbibed by Travelling, concerning the Nature of God, his Attributes, and Dispensations, or the true State and Condition of Man in this World, and his Relation to the next, they were all derived originally from this Source, were all Emanations, one way or other, from the *Father of Lights*. By erecting the *Babylonian*, *Persian*, *Grecian*, and *Roman* Empires, God had scattered the

^a Deut. xxxii. 8.

^b Exodus xix. 6.

ple of the *Jews* into all Parts of the then known World; and soon after the Foundation of the Third Monarchy, having by his Providence caused the Holy Scriptures to be translated into *Greek*, at that Time the most universal Language, the learned Heathens found means of improving their Knowledge by the Assistance of them; as under the two former Monarchies, *Pythagoras*, *Plato*, and others had profited by conversing with the dispersed *Jews*. But the further Prosecution of this Part of the Subject, namely, How far the antient *Greeks*, within the Period of the *Mosaic* Dispensation, had availed themselves of the Books of the Old Testament, or had increased their Store of Learning by trafficking with the great Men of the *East*, we are not now at liberty to indulge; but must content ourselves with only observing in general, that their whole Stock of Oriental Knowledge was, in Process of Time, transferred to *Rome*, where it became very instrumental, as it did likewise in *Greece*, in preparing Mens Minds for the Reception of the Gospel.

If the Old Testament could effect thus much, what may we not expect from the plain and open and authoritative Declarations of the New? from the unspotted Character of the divine Author of it, and the mighty Signs and Wonders that attended its Promulgation? *Pontius Pilate*, the *Roman* Governour, was so deeply affected with the Innocence of the *Lamb of God*, when he was brought before him, that, after

after labouring all he could to procure his Release, and giving him that public Attestation of being a *righteous and just Person*, he persisted, in spite of the Remonstrances the *Jews* made to the contrary, in affording him that further Testimony contained in the Inscription put upon the Cross, **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** The *Roman Centurion*, in like manner, who was appointed to watch *Jesus* at the Crucifixion, when he saw the Earthquake and the other wonderful Occurrences that accompanied his Expiration, feared greatly, and was constrained to acknowledge the Truth of his Pretensions to a divine Extraction, by crying out, **TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD.** The Citizens of *Athens* had erected an Altar to the **UNKNOWN GOD**, in which altho' they were very superstitious, not knowing what they meant, yet the Fact discovers the Influence and Persuasion they were under, that there was a divine Being of great Majesty and Power, different from any of those they were at present acquainted with, *viz.* the Lord *Jehovah*, the Creator of the Universe; which must induce them, when the Time came that this unknown Deity should be preached unto them, to embrace him and his Worship with the greater Facility; and accordingly *St. Paul*, at his first coming amongst them, laid hold of it, as an occasion of Discourse. *As I passed by, says he, and beheld your Devotions, I found an Altar with this Inscription, To the Unknown God:*

Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you, God that made the World and all things therein,^a &c. This, by the way, may serve for an Example of the Greeks being beforehand disposed for the Admission of the glad Tidings of the Gospel; it shews, they were accustomed to look further than those paltry impure Deities which the pregnant Fancies of the Poets had dressed up for common Use: But I mention it here on account of what followed, in regard of the Effects of the Apostle's Discourse upon the unbelieving Part of his Audience; for it happened in this Case, as was most natural to expect, that whilst some *clave unto him and believed*^b, others *mocked* at him, and a third Part there was, who, tho' they did not fully believe, were nevertheless very sensibly touched with his Doctrine; as is evident from these Words, *And when they heard of the Resurrection of the Dead, some mocked: And others said, We will hear thee again of this Matter*^c.

The bold and clear Assertions, contained in this Revelation, against Polytheism and Idolatry, must work powerfully upon many of the Heathen, who yet were far from being Christians: They were induced to become less credulous; were enabled to discern the Follies and Absurdities of the fabulous History of their Gods; yea, and to go so far sometimes as to expose and ridicule them. Some, who were loth to desert their old Teachers, endeavour'd

^a Acts xvii. 23, 24. ^b *Id.* 32. ^c *Id.* 34.

to false the Credit of *Homer* and the other Mythologists, by allegorizing the Fables and interpreting them physically; but others of a more ludicrous Vein, made no Scruple of deriding them. *Lucian* is a flagrant Instance of this, who upon all occasions indulges his sarcastic Vein in laughing with great freedom at the Gods of the Heathen. *Lucian* was no Christian himself, but that he had made some Acquaintance with the Tenets of that Institution, we can be well assured from certain severe Tokens he has left us of it.

Again, When an Evangelist represented the dread Father of the Universe as a spiritual Being, pure and holy, infinitely just and good, the Propositions were so consentaneous to the obvious Dictates of right Reason, that they must naturally beget in all such Hearers, as were not absolute Bigots to the Religion of their Fathers, a secret Diffidence and Dislike of all those indecent, impious, and cruel Rites wherewith their religious Worship had been till then polluted and profaned; or, when he reasoned with them concerning a Resurrection of the Dead and a future Judgment, of Life eternal, and eternal Punishment, all sober, thinking Men must slight the incoherent Dreams of *Tartarus* and *Elysium*, reflect upon the accountable Nature of the human Soul, think seriously, and, with *Felix*, think and tremble.

But what most impressed the Minds of the deluded *Gentiles*, was, thirdly, the Christian Pattern;

Pattern ; those fine Examples which the Disciples and Followers of the blessed *Jesus* set before them : Their Light shone before Men ; who, as they could not help admiring the Innocence, the Humility, and the Piety of their Lives, began by degrees to discover the Amiability of the Christian Conversation, silently to applaud it, and, at last, so far as they dared for Shame, or Fear, or other sinister Considerations, to imitate it. Those who had been used to *steal* would *steal no more, but rather would labour, working with their Hands the Things that were good, that they might have to give to them that needed* ; instead of Insolence, Cruelty, and Injustice, they would be taught to do justly, to love Mercy, and walk humbly, to follow after Charity and every Christian Grace. An Heathen with these Advantages, and originally blest with a Goodness of Nature, could not be *far from the Kingdom of Heaven* ; and how favourably the Father of all Mercies, allowing for the strong Prejudices of Education, the Violence of natural Affection, the Prevalence of Motives immediately present, and other the like Weaknesses incident to Man, may interpret the Works, I do not say the Good Works, of such Men, no one can tell. But however this be, I think it cannot be doubted, but many more of the Antients had given their Names unto *Christ*, had not the Fear of Reproach, or of Trouble, or of Libels and Imprisonment, deterred them : Such as these one may call *Agrippists* or
Half

Half Christians, who were *almost persuaded*, who were *altogether persuaded*, had not Interest of some sort or other interfer'd, to have become *Christians*. They were such *Gentiles* as these, who were suspected, and carried before the Magistrates in Times of Persecution^a. But, alas! they wanted Spirit and Boldness to *confess him before Men*; as is the Case of many among the *Mohametans* at this Day, and of too many amongst us, who, whilst they are Friends of the Christian Religion at Heart, revere depraved Custom more than their own Consciences, and give too much into the fashionable Discourse and Scepticism of the Times. The Emperors *Hadrian*, and *Severus Alexander* were of the Number of these *Semi-Christians*, whereof the former intended once to have erected Temples to the Memory of our blessed Saviour, but thought fit to drop the Design, lest it should prove the Downfall of the established Religion; however, he did make several without Images^b. The latter used this Sentence for his Motto, *What thou likest not to be done to thyself, do not to another*; an Apophthegm which he had learned from the Christians, of whom he entertained many in his Court, as likewise did his Mother *Julia Mamaea*. This Emperor had the same Design with *Hadrian*, of building a pub-

^a So *Pliny* the Younger, writing to the Emperor *Trajan*,
^b Proposuit est libellus sine auctore, multorum nomina continens, qui negarent se esse Christianos, aut fuisse." *Epist.* x.

^b *Lampridius* in *Alex. Severo*.

lic Temple to the Honour of *Jesus Christ*; and it is certain, that he kept both his and *Abraham's* Image amongst the *Lares* of his private Oratory*. It could not fail, but these great Personages must have been much improved in their Morals by the Conversation of those Christians they so highly esteemed; and if the Emperor *Julian* preserved a Strictness of Manners after his Apostasy, it must be deem'd the Effect of his former Life, whereby his Mind had been so settled in Goodness and habituated to Virtue, that it was no small difficulty to shake it off. For tho' he was one of the bitterest and most powerful Enemies Christianity ever had, yet was he a great Admirer of the Purity of its Morals, of the Hospitality, the Abstinence and Regularity of its Professors. This was not to be dissembled, whilst he was daily endeavouring to model his *Gentilism* after the Plan of Christianity, and recommended to his idolatrous Priests the Imitation of the Christian Votaries: In which, methinks, he did more Honour to our holy Religion, than all his Attempts to suppress it could ever do it Hurt.

Private Persons, who lived more in the midst of it, and thereby had more frequent and better Opportunities of observing it closely, and remarking its Beauties, were still more liable to its Influence. Towards the Conclusion of the First Century, or, at furthest, the

* Lampridius in Alex. Severo.

Commencement of the Second, the Christians were become exceeding numerous both in Town and Country^a, by which means their Examples spread far and wide, and the bewitching Charms of a meek, a charitable, and merciful Deportment caught many, stealing upon them unawares, whilst in their outward Professions they continued meer *Panims*; particularly when the Christians were brought before the Tribunals, and their Enemies had nothing to alledge against them but their Name^b. When such innocent Men and Women, I say, were adjudged to Death or to the Question, their pious Resignation, the Serenity of their Brows, the Fervour of their Devotion, and the Firmness and Constancy of their Minds, wherewith they were seen to meet Death in his most frightful Shapes; these all together made such a Blaze in the World as both enlightened and warmed the Hearts of the admiring Spectators. Wherefore *Tertullian* writes to the *Gentiles*, " But do your
 " worst, and rack your Inventions for Tor-
 " tures for Christians; 'tis all to no Purpose :
 " You do but attract the World, and make
 " it fall the more in love with our Religion.
 " The more you mow us down, the thicker
 " we rise : The Christian Blood you spill
 " is like the Seed you sow; it springs from
 " the Earth again, and fructifies the more.

^a Plin. Epist. x. 97. Tertulliani Apologet. Cap. i. & xxxvii.

^b Plinius, ibid.

“ Many of your Philosophers have set them-
 “ selves to write the World into Patience and
 “ a Contempt of Death, as *Cicero* in his *Tus-*
 “ *culan Questions*, *Seneca* in his *Remedies*
 “ *against Accidents*, *Diogenes*, *Pyrrho*, and
 “ *Callinicus* ; but their pompous Glitter of
 “ Words hath not made the Tythe of Dis-
 “ ciples that *our Lives* have done. That
 “ which you reproach in us as Stubbornness,
 “ hath been the most instructing Mistress in
 “ profelyting the World ; for who hath not
 “ been struck at the Sight of that you call
 “ Stubbornness, and from thence pushed on
 “ to look into the Reason and Reality of it ^a ? ”
 ’Twas thus the Blood of the Martyrs became
 the Seed of the Church ; and *that*, together
 with the Miracles which the primitive
 Christians were enabled to work in Confir-
 mation of the Faith, and the engaging Ex-
 amples they daily set before the Eyes of the
 World, would have won the Hearts of Un-
 believers much more, had they not been
 greatly obstructed in their Influence by some
 early Heretics, whose Lives were as wicked
 and scandalous, as their Opinions were im-
 pious and detestable ; for, as these Here-
 siarchs and their Adherents called themselves
 Christians, as well as the most exemplary,
 the unwary might not easily distinguish the
 one from the other, any more than at first
 they did the Christians from the *Jews*.

^a Apologet. Cap. 1.

Hence arose many of those strange, incredible, and otherwise unaccountable Calumnies wherewith the *Pagans* would sometimes load the first Christians, as *Justin Martyr* not obscurely intimates^a.

But perhaps it may here be said, That the *Jews* in general, for some time before the Destruction of their City, were remarkably wicked, even beyond the Example of all former Ages. This, I believe, was but too true of the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, though not of others dispersed in the Provinces. But, why was that? but because the Gospel, whereof they were *not worthy*, had been withdrawn and carried to the *Gentiles*; wherefore the *Candlestick* being once removed, they were out of the reach of its Beams, they were abandoned, and the *Measure of their Iniquity being full*, were actually given up to a *reprobate Mind*. How should they hear without a Preacher? Whereupon it may be proper to observe, That, as the Gospel could not possibly operate where it was not known, so where it was most purely professed, it struck People most; its Influence was always in proportion to its Purity: And this I judge may be the Reason, why many of the first Converts among the *Franks* in *Gaul*, and the *Saxons* in *Britain*, were so little better than Heathens; for the Christian Religion, as first tendered to them, was grievously

^a Apolog. i. p. 43. Edit. Thirlby.

corrupted, having in a great measure lost all its Energy as a practical Religion ; instead of which it consisted chiefly in an outward Profession of the Name of *Christ*, in receiving the Sacraments in a lifeless manner, and a few other Ceremonies, such as, a particular Form of Tonsure, the proper Time of keeping *Easter*, and Subjection to the See of *Rome* ; which unhappily were reputed the most essential Parts thereof. But when, more antiently, the Word was sincerely handled, truly taught, and as truly practised, as we must suppose it was in its Infancy, the Faithful were Men of another Character, were all Piety and Virtue and Goodness ; against whom the by-standing *Gentiles* had no one Species of Immorality to object, no Vices to alledge. Its Charms were equally commanding and extensive ; it was adorned by its Professors, and by that means was very principally recommended to the Observation, to the Favour and good Opinion of its Opponents.

But it is Time now to consider what Advantage such Moderns as affect to despise the Revelation of the Gospel, have derived and do derive from it. The Deists, whom we are here mainly concerned with, pretend to be great Advocates for the Sufficiency of Reason in Matters of Religion ; but they are guilty of a double Error herein, first, in misjudging and over-rating Reason, and then in
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assigning her a Province, which, in her present dark and imperfect State, she was never intended, and indeed is entirely unqualified for. They estimate her Abilities unduly, when in some of their Positions they suppose her to be at this Day as free and perfect as she was in the Paradisiacal State, before the Fall; when they make no allowances for the strong Counterpoize of Appetite and Passion; when they measure her mean Proportion by the Standard of a few elevated Genius's, and, lastly, when they are so disingenuous or thoughtless as to overlook the seasonable Aid she hath been furnished with by Revelation, her faithful and powerful Ally. This last Article falling within the Compass of the present Intention, I shall pay due Regard to it in the Sequel of this Discourse.

It must be allowed, that some of these Moral Philosophers, as they are pleased to style themselves, will, upon occasion, discourse very accurately and fully on the great Principles of the Religion of Nature, and possibly lead their Lives, in appearance at least, very conformably thereto. But, alas! they are very wide of the Mark, when they attribute the Justness of their Sentiments, or the Clearness and Certainty of their Ideas, to the Strength of their own Reason and the Force of their natural Parts; they forget their *Master's Crib*: For why? Have they not been nurtured in a Christian Country; inured to the

the Use of the Scriptures and the Maxims there laid down? Have they not been trained in the Discourses of our excellent Divines, which are all founded upon the Scriptures? And these, as well as the Scriptures themselves, are they not still continually obliged, in the course of their Disputes with us, to have recourse to and revolve. They do not sufficiently consider these Things, nor how much the Cast of a Man's Mind and the Turn of his Thought will be controuled by Prepossessions so agreeable to Reason as the fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel are, even tho' they should strive afterwards and do all they can to divest themselves of them: 'Tis difficult for Men to say in such Case, what is properly their own and the sole Product of their Reasonings and Deductions, and what is assumed; so intimately will borrowed Notions intermix with the Train of their own Thoughts; so continually will they be obtruding upon them, even in spite of themselves. 'Tis no uncommon thing for People to give a very tolerable Account of an Historical Fact, or any other Affair, which they have formerly read in some Author, but have forgot where; sometimes have forgot that they ever saw it in any Book at all; but believing they had the Subject Matter from some living Relater, esteem the Expression with the manner of the Representation to be all their own. But perhaps the Case of these

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Unbelievers may receive some Illustration, by supposing a Person altogether conversant with one certain Author for a good Part of his Life, as with *Cicero*, for Instance, whom some, Enthusiasts in their Way, have been so doatingly fond of, as never to think it necessary to turn into any other; such an one, should he afterwards find occasion to exercise his Pen in the *Latin* Tongue, and endeavour to form a Style of his own, would find it an hard Task to throw off the Diction and Turn of his old Friend; the Colour and Complexion of his Performance would be so much *Ciceronian* as to betray itself to every competent Judge. This seems very much to be the Case; and Reason, which the Enemies to Revelation would fondly put in Competition with it, is a Thing by no means pure and simple, but a Mixture, tho' perhaps involuntary, of the great Truths of Revelation and their own Conceptions. Here then lies the Fallacy: They judge of Reason and its Powers by what they find it in themselves at present, by what is not strictly Reason, but a Compound, whereof the predominant Part is Scripture, or the Sentiments of others deduced therefrom or grounded thereupon. For it is not to be denied, but all the great Articles of Natural Religion have been handled in a most masterly Manner, previous to any Writings or Productions of theirs, by Christians of great Note, both Philosophers and Divines,

Divines, some of whom they will profess themselves great Admirers of, as indeed they ought in Justice, considering how much they have profited by their Labours.

Would we then truly estimate, how far the meer Faculty of Reason can really go in religious Affairs, we must first strip her of her borrowed Feathers. This may be done by trying what she effects at this time, unassisted by Revelation, in the *East* and *West Indies*, or what she did antiently amongst the *Greeks* and *Romans*, before the Impartment of the Gospel; and there is no other Method of doing it, or of bringing her to a fair Trial, but by this Alternative. Now what she does at this Day in the very best informed Parts of *Asia*, *Africa*, and *America*, is too well known to be long insisted on: Idolatry and Superstition, Sorcery and Divination, the absurdest Doctrines, the most cruel and immoral Practices, all prevail in one Part or other, and in most Places, many of them at once. And as for the Antients, whoever will candidly and impartially examine the State of Religion amongst them, even amongst their great Doctors, the Philosophers, which is more than needs be allowed in the Cause, will soon find reason to give them up, as poor blind Guides in divine Things: Very ignorant were they in some Matters, in others very immoral. There is no Certainty in their Writings, to enforce a steady and uniform Assent;

Assent; no Agreement amongst them, nor any adequate Authority, to establish a Truth when found out; but what was advanced by one Author was immediately disputed, and perhaps refuted, by another. I speak not of trivial Matters, where there might be no great Inconvenience in Altercation, or even in Error; but of Points of the utmost Consequence to the Being and Well-being of Man, and that both here and hereafter. It may possibly be here objected, that this Method of trying the Force of Reason excludes all Improvement from farther Discoveries and maturer Deliberation. I answer; All subsequent Researches would be liable to the same Defects, Uncertainty, and Want of Authority. There were no less than 350 Years from *Socrates*, who first began to moralize to any Purpose, and the Age of *Cicero*; and yet the Antients, at the end of this Term, after Philosophizing all the while in the best manner they were able, were every whit as uncertain and sceptical as ever, if not more so. Thus again, though so many Centuries have interven'd from that time to this, the *Africans*, *Asiatics*, and *Americans*, so far as we can judge, have not advanced one Step either in Learning or Morals, neither have they any Prospect of ever rescuing themselves from such palpable Darkness, unless it should please God, in his own appointed Time, to suffer the *Day-spring from on high to visit them*, in like manner

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manner as it hath already illuminated the other Parts of the *Gentile* World. 'Tis a Question with me, whether, had our Moderns been left to themselves and the Guidance of their own busy, capricious Imaginations, their Essays would not have been as loose and illogical, as thick sown with Doubts, Perplexities and Errors, as the Compositions of the Antients. The Inference is obvious, That the Delineations of Religion, so clearly and methodically drawn out by the Pens of our Naturalists, are not so much the Productions of Nature, as of Art; are not so much the Efforts of human, as the infallible Dictates of divine Wisdom.

As for the other Particular which I mentioned, the Moral Character of these Moderns, for which some of them lay a specious Claim to our Commendation: This, which is as nearly related to the Subject of this Discourse as their Writings, and therefore will demand some Notice, ought perhaps rather to be imputed to the regular Government they live under, the wholesome Laws, and the Force of Shame and Reproach in a civilized, or, to speak more properly, in a Christianized Country, than the Tenor of their own Inclinations, regulated and subdued by the Convictions of rectified Reason. The Influence of Order and good Government is very great and extensive, restraining many warm Heads and bad Hearts from breaking out into Violence.

lence. The Magistrate's Sword keeps Multitudes in Subjection, who would otherwise run Riot; whilst the Examples of the sober and sedate, whom they cannot but admire and approve, conspire to accomplish their Reformation: Not but that Justice, Temperance, Chastity and Peaceableness do many times find Admirers for their own Sakes; but then we have small Cause to believe, that these alone, without any other Bridle, would restrain Men in all Cases, when Want presses, Lust burns, Revenge boils, or the Impotency of any other boistrous Passion domineers: The Rein is then most wanted, when Reason is capable of doing least.

Again, Whatever the Hearts of these Infidels may be, and as much as Virtue is now out of Countenance, yet they are obliged to keep up a Face of Decency, or they would make no Way. But this is not all; though Men pretend to disbelieve the Gospel, yet they are no Strangers now-a-days to its Contents; they know too well what it requires and what it threatens; this being in a great measure the very Thing that sets them against it. This now will effectually keep their Fears awake, and put them every now and then upon their Guard. They have reason to dread every present Infliction, seeing they are more destitute of Hope and Comfort, and less able to undergo it than others. The Magistrate is also a Minister of the Gospel: But should

they, slight and disregard both these, there is no trifling with the just Judgment of God at the last Day. Company, Amusement, Health and Vigour of Body, Pride and Gaiety of Heart, may for a Time, and at Times, stifle their Apprehensions of a final Doom, but they will ever and anon be recurring with additional Force. Lives there a Wretch so hardened as not to be startled, on occasion, with this important Thought?

Without these and other such Reasons, it would be difficult to account for the *Phænoménon* of a modern Infidel's being in reality a better Liver, I speak of the Generality of them, than the ancient Heathen; for when one reflects on the Tenets of some of their leading Men, That private Vices are public Benefits; That Suicide is allowable and Praiseworthy; That a fatal Necessity over-rules all human Actions; That the Soul of Man is material and mortal, and the like brutal Opinions, it is highly reasonable to conclude, were it safe to act at Pleasure, they would soon throw off the Masque, and bring us all into Confusion, by burying the Peace of Mankind in Outrage and Combustion; or, if they were now living amongst the *Hottentots* and *Cafres*, instead of a Christian Country, that they would quickly grow as dissolute and licentious, as treacherous and murderous, as any the least enlightned Savage of them all. Can such Deism be any thing else but a Cloak for
Atheism?

Atheism? But we must take it as we find it; and since Men have the Hardiness to avow and propagate such pestilent Notions as the above-mentioned, and in despite, as it were, of the common Sense and Judgment of all those they live peaceably and quietly amongst, they must be possessed and enslaved by them; and it can be Government only, supported by Religion, together with the unobserved Influence of that Institution, in whose Bosom they are tolerated, that confines them within any reasonable Bounds, and affords them both Reason and Opportunity, if haply they do, to perceive their Errors and change their Minds. Nay, I must think, if any of the better Sort amongst them ever feel in their Breasts a Ray of that extensive Benevolence which they will sometimes so greatly extol, 'tis more a Lesson learned from the Discourses of Christian Divines on the great Gospel Duty of Universal Charity, or from the happy Effects of it in so many shining Examples all round them, than the Result of their natural Temper, improved by meer rational Speculations: We have certainly no Cause to ascribe either this, or the Glimmerings of any other Evangelical Grace shining *in them*, and unknown to the Antients, to any thing else but the Energy and Efficacy of the Gospel, the *Tree* being always *known by its Fruits*.

And thus, tho' at this Day we pretend not to that Brightness of Example, which in the
Dawn

Dawn of Christianity irradiated the cotemporary *Gentiles*, yet where the Religion of the holy *Jesus* is become the Establishment, there will be some Reflexion, and the *Light* will still *shine in Darkness*. The Church of *Christ*, at least the sound Part of it, to whom are now committed the *Oracles of God*, is at this Time performing that Task to the modish Anti-scripturists, the deluded *Mahometans*, and the poor benighted *Indians*, which formerly both it and the *Mosaic* Oeconomy did to the unconverted Heathen. We have Authority for saying this from *St. Peter*, who applies that Text, which before was spoken by God of the Children of *Israel*, to the whole Body of us Christians: *But ye are a chosen Generation, says he, a royal Priesthood, an holy Nation, a peculiar People, that ye should shew forth the Praises of him who hath called you out of Darkness into his marvellous Light*^b. With this Design do all those other Passages coincide, wherein the Faithful are styled *the Salt of the Earth, the Light of the World, a City placed upon a Hill*, and the like: And from hence arises that strict and high Obligation which lies upon the Christian to behave himself in the most exemplary Manner, for the Edification of the Brethren, the Conversion of Unbelievers, and the Benefit of his own Soul; for *they that be wise shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament, and they that*

^a See before Page 9.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 9.

turn many to Righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever^a. We are a peculiar People, in order to be zealous of good Works, for every one that nameth the Name of Christ is bound to depart from Iniquity, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World. 'Tis thus that obstinate Resisters must be the better for us; 'tis thus that in many Senses they are so; and I pray God, it may at length serve them to better Purpose than to encrease their Condemnation. Very thankless they are, God knows, and insensible under the Benefit, like many other stupid and regardless Mortals, who enjoy the ordinary Mercies of God's Providence, without perceiving or acknowledging them, ever ascribing to their own Skill and Dexterity, or to some lucky Incident, what is solely the Effect of his indulgent Beneficence. But nevertheless one may justly wonder at the Infatuation of these Gain-sayers, who would be thought to be Men of some Penetration, in not discerning the extraordinary Succours which Revelation hath been continually lending to the Light of Nature; *the Light shineth in Darknes, and the Darknes comprehendeth it not*: Or, if they do, either at their Folly, in preferring the dim Taper of Reason before the meridian Sunshine of the Gospel, or the Blackness of their Ingratitude, in making such base Returns, by rejecting the Profers of the Most High, insulting

^a Dan. xii. 3.

his Goodness, and trampling upon his Word, and, would they pardon me the Coarseness of the Allusion, I should say, in acting the Part of common Thieves and Robbers, those Pests of Society, who are daily flying in the Face of those Laws and that Government whose Protection they are daily enjoying. Are there not too good Grounds for asserting, that *Men love Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds are evil?*

But for us, my Brethren in *Christ Jesus*, who have learned to distinguish the separate Provinces of Reason and Revelation, to regard the former as a singular Gift of God, but still as the Handmaid and Beneficiary of the latter; may God give us Grace so to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest his Word, that by *patient Continuance in well-doing, Men may see our good Works*; and all who have erred and are deceived may sooner or later be brought into the right Way, which God of his infinite Mercy grant.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all Honour and Glory, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, both now and for ever.

^a John iii. 19.

F I N I S.

